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EVALUATION OF THE
PIEDMONT PARK SYSTEM

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Bay Area Social Planning Council



EVALUATION OF THE
PIEDMONT PARK SYSTEM

← Piedmont City Council
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" Adm.

Prepared at the Request of
the Piedmont City Council

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I. INTRODUCTION

Evaluation of the Piedmont Park System, as set forth in the May 28, 1974, Proposal of the Bay Area Social Planning Council, was conducted June 26 to July 9, 1974, under the direction of Jay Ver Lee. Mr. Allan Brown, former Horticultural Superintendent of the Oakland Park Department, spent two days on the study. Mr. Brown made detailed inspections of all park properties, visiting each of the major units two or three times. Mr. Ver Lee inspected all properties, visiting the major units as many as four times on different days and at different times of the day.

Three interviews were held with Mr. Leonard Ferreira, Superintendent of Parks, and Mr. Ed Zidich, acting foreman. Twelve on-site interviews were conducted with the Department's gardeners by Mr. Brown or Mr. Ver Lee. An interview was held with Mr. Cray Hensley, Superintendent of Recreation. All members of the City staff were very cooperative and helpful.

The Corporation Yard and decentralized work stations were visited. Equipment used by the men was discussed with them and inspected.

Park administrators in five cities and one county who are involved with private landscape maintenance contracts for public grounds and parks were contacted. Contact was also made with a large landscape maintenance firm that contracts with cities and counties.

Advice relative to the use of private contract landscape maintenance was obtained from two lawyers, a city personnel director and a labor consultant involved in municipal labor negotiations and civil service matters.

The Park Master Plan, park budgets, correspondence, reports and other data relating to the park system were reviewed. Proposals of three private landscape contractors previously submitted to the Piedmont Park Commission were evaluated.

The results of the BASPC evaluation are presented in the following sections: Summary of Findings and Recommendations; Finances; Park Personnel; Supervision and Scheduling; Deficiencies; Impediments to Efficient Maintenance; and Private Contract Maintenance. A detailed analysis of park areas is contained in the Appendix.

II. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Park budget of the City and the number of staff members in the Park Department are sufficient to provide a high level of maintenance on the 29 acres of park lands.
2. Despite adequate resources, the level of maintenance is not what it should be. Deficiencies are evident at a number of park areas.
3. Certain conditions that are present in the park areas impede the efficient use of manpower and tend to lower standards. Many of these conditions require financial outlays for equipment and improvements, but some are operational.
4. Improved supervision and scheduling of manpower, along with a well planned in-service training program, would result in higher maintenance standards. Definite goals and objectives for such a program should be established with a timetable for its completion.
5. More efficient use of manpower and removal of some impediments to good maintenance should result in a reduction in the number of gardeners. More use of mobile crews would increase productivity.
6. A savings of one man-year can be accomplished by eliminating the Park Nursery. Most cities have phased out their nursery operations. The nurseryman can replace a less skilled worker and use his know-how to help upgrade the parks.
7. The present salary plan for gardeners should be revised to bring it in line with practices in other cities. The present plan has a good entry level salary but does not provide an incentive system to motivate workers toward improving their skills and output.

8. Contracting with a private firm for park maintenance is a feasible alternative to the present system. It should improve the level of maintenance at less cost to the City. However, its implementation presents some practical and legal problems that need to be considered.
9. Any consideration of contract maintenance for park lands should also involve a decision as to how the maintenance of six acres of recreation land should be handled. The present duplication of ground maintenance operations in the two separate departments should be eliminated.

III. FINANCES

The Piedmont Park Department budget for 1973-74 fiscal year was \$150,560. Nearly 80 percent of the budget (\$119,400) represents salaries. The second largest item in the budget is \$13,500 for contract services as follows:

Tree Trimming	\$8,000
Tree Spraying	1,500
Oakland Scavenger	3,500
Patch Repairs	500

The remainder of the budget includes: \$8,760 for equipment, utilities, materials and supplies; \$6,000 for capital outlay; and \$2,900 for a hospitalization plan.

The Park Department budget compares very favorably with budgets in ten northern California cities with slightly larger populations. The Piedmont Park Department budget for 1973-74 fiscal year represents a \$13.79 per capita cost. Per capita costs for parks in ten small Bay Area cities with populations of 13,000 to 26,000 are listed below:

Albany	\$9.34
Mill Valley	9.31
El Cerrito	6.64
San Carlos	5.97
San Anselmo	5.86
Union City	5.60
Belmont	4.75
Pleasanton	4.68
San Pablo	2.51
Pinole	2.50

IV. PARK PERSONNEL

The City of Piedmont operates its park system with 12 full-time employees supplemented with two part-time workers during the summer months. The park positions with 1973-74 salary data, years of service and age of worker are presented below:

	<u>Salary</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Years of Service</u>
Superintendent of Parks	\$1,375	55	24 yrs., 5 mos.
Foreman	960	63	28 yrs., 7 mos.
Nurseryman	801	55	26 yrs., 5 mos.
Truck Driver	749	31	2 yrs., 9 mos.
Gardener (Special)	789	51	23 yrs., 6 mos.
Gardener (Special)	757	63	21 yrs., 4 mos.
Gardener (Special)	750	47	17 yrs., 2 mos.
Gardener	738	51	17 yrs., 3 mos.
Gardener	738	60	9 yrs., 6 mos.
Gardener	738	58	3 yrs., 7 mos.
Gardener	738	44	- 3 mos.
Gardener	738	36	- 3 mos.

Seven of the employees have worked for the City more than 17 years; four have worked more than 23 years. Six are over 55 years of age; three are over 60 years of age. If the City goes into the State Public Employees' Retirement System, five employees are eligible for voluntary retirement.

The starting salary for gardeners is high as compared with some Bay Area cities, but the top gardener salary in Piedmont (Nurseryman) is low by comparison.

TEXT TABLE A

<u>City</u>	Salary of Gardeners (1973-74)*	
	<u>Entry Salary</u>	<u>Top Salary</u>
Piedmont	\$738	\$801
El Cerrito	737	888
San Leandro	717	936
San Anselmo	715	896
Albany	716	810
Berkeley	709	948
Martinez	693	933
Oakland	660	935
Piedmont Schools	628	765

* Most of the cities listed have two classes of Gardener. Oakland, Martinez and Berkeley have three classes, including a Gardener-Trainee.

This very limited spread (\$738-801) between entry level and top of scale does not offer much incentive to work hard for advancement. Two gardeners who have been on the job three months receive the same salary as a gardener that has been with the City more than 17 years.

The civil service job specification for "Gardener" sets forth duties commonly performed by that class of worker. Most of the duties listed are being performed by the gardeners in the more developed areas. Gardeners assigned to median strips, Dracena and lower Piedmont Park perform a limited number of the duties listed. There is relatively little propagation of plants and limited spraying and fertilizing involved.

A comparison of 1973-74 salaries of Park Foremen in nine small Bay Area cities is presented in Text Table B. The Piedmont salary for a man who has been in the position for a number of years is low by comparison

with the other cities.

TEXT TABLE B

<u>City</u>	<u>Park Foreman Salary Scale</u>
San Rafael	\$974-1,172
Mill Valley	952-1,157
San Leandro	936-1,139
Millbrae	930-1,130
Martinez	910-1,107
San Anselmo	883-1,107
Pacifica	842-1,017
Piedmont	- 960
Albany	849- 932

It is difficult to present adequate comparative data on the position of a Superintendent of Parks operating a separate Parks Department. Fifty California cities under 20,000 population were checked, but only two cities had a separate Parks Department. Salaries of Directors of combined Parks and Recreation Departments in forty cities under 20,000 population were compared with the salary for Piedmont's Superintendent of Parks. Nine cities paid higher salaries to their Parks and Recreation Director (over \$1,375 per month). Thirty-one cities paid less than \$1,375 per month.

V. SUPERVISION AND SCHEDULING

The Park Foreman is responsible for practically all of the direct supervision of the gardeners. This position is being filled on an acting basis by Mr. Ed Zidich. Mr. L. Crane, the Park Foreman, had been off duty for some months with a serious injury and is back on a light duty assignment. One gardener, Mr. J. Gamble, works as a leadman in upper Piedmont Park and oversees one full-time and one part-time gardener.

The Superintendent of Parks appears to have little contact with the men, despite the small numbers involved. Some of the men rarely see the Superintendent. One new man, in the Department for nearly three months, has not yet met the Superintendent. The men indicate they see the foreman nearly every day and that he brings them tools and other items they need.

The supervisory process appears to be one of keeping the status quo rather than giving attention to laying out new work and meeting deficiencies. There is little evidence that men are given either short-term or long-term objectives to work toward or that timetables are set for accomplishing certain tasks.

The basic approach to scheduling is the assignment of a given park area or areas to each man. The present assignments are as follows:

N. Kordic	Lower Piedmont Park	9.25 acres
J. Trestler	Dracena Park	5.00 acres
J. Gamble	Part of Upper Piedmont Park, City Hall and Veterans Bldg.	3.70 acres
D. Kolbert	Part of Upper Piedmont Park, Highland Strip, and three small parcels	3.40 acres

D. Stoop	Nursery	0.80 acre
H. Gray*	Fairview, Grand Ave., and San Carlos Strips and Wildwood Triangle	2.03 acres
J. Zidich	Crocker Park and Fenway	1.27 acres
L. Gabrielson	Linda Strip and Street Trees	1.27 acres
R. Guitierrez (Truck Driver)	Nova, Oakmont and Scenic Circles and Street Trees	.13 acre
L. Crane (Foreman)	On light duty with Truck Driver	
	Total	<hr/> 26.85 acres

Of the 26.85 acres listed above, 21.35 acres are assigned to four men. Assuming one man-year for street tree work, five man-years are available to maintain 5.5 acres, or a little more than one acre per man, a very low standard under any conditions. For example, gardeners in many of the more highly developed parks in Oakland maintain from 4-1/2 to 6 acres each. Nine gardeners and a foreman maintain 54 acres of parks in Martinez, California. One foreman and five gardeners maintain nearly 30 acres in Albany, California.

An analysis of the areas being serviced, as set forth above, indicates the need to evaluate assignments to see how effectively manpower is being used and how work can be more evenly distributed. Inasmuch as the City contracts for street tree work, a study should be made as to whether a gardener and a truck driver should be assigned part-time to street tree work or whether it should be handled by contract.

* Mr. Gray has been off duty until recently with an injury. Mr. Gabrielson has been taking over his responsibilities.

VI. DEFICIENCIES

Detailed deficiencies at the various park areas are presented in the Appendix. A summary is presented below:

- a. Heavy infestation of broad leaf weeds in lawn areas.
- b. Badly sheared shrubs that should be pruned to emphasize their natural shapes.
- c. Trees in the parks that need thinning and trimming.
Dead branches should be removed.
- d. Weeds in flower and shrub beds.
- e. Overcrowded shrub and tree groupings.
- f. Lack of edging of lawn areas.
- g. Deteriorated paths, steps and benches.
- h. Outdated and poorly maintained play equipment.
- i. Erosion in Piedmont, Linda and Dracena Parks.
- j. Lack of fertilization and spraying.

VII. IMPEDIMENTS TO EFFICIENT MAINTENANCE

A number of conditions make it more difficult to maintain the park areas. Some of these will involve capital improvements to correct. Some are conditions that can be corrected by the gardeners.

Lack of certain types of equipment hinders efficient maintenance. A great deal of time is spent cleaning paths with hand equipment. A large vacuum cleaner would cut man-hours. Back-pack blowers would assist in cleaning paths and removing leaves. The small power edger in the Department is unusable at present. A larger power edger is needed. A portable electric hedge shearer with a small generator would cut man-hours and improve appearances. Spray equipment is needed to supplement the spraying done by contract.

Many man-hours go into the watering of lawns and plants. The new Crocker Park has automatic irrigation and only a few small areas have a manual-valve system. Hoses that have to be moved around are used at most locations. An automatic system in upper Piedmont Park and manual-valve installations at other areas would result in better maintenance and make possible a reduction in personnel.

Replacement and improvement of paths and steps would make maintenance easier and upgrade the appearance of some parks.

A number of areas, particularly the large median strips, have an abundance of shrubs that require continuous pruning. The appearance of these areas could be improved and maintenance hours reduced if they were replaced with low maintenance shrubs and ground covers. A lot of this work could be accomplished in the rainy season when less time is needed

for other tasks.

There appears to be an absence of a planned program of training and upgrading of the gardeners. Very few men enter the job with much, if any, gardening background. There is an obvious need for special training courses to improve work methods and increase motivation. A number of resources, most of them free, are available to park departments. Specialists in pruning, fertilizing, weed control, turf management and other skills could be brought in to conduct classes and workshops in the winter when the men can be spared from outdoor work. Many park departments send their gardeners and foremen to one- or two-day workshops in nearby cities. This same kind of opportunity and exposure to new methods should be available to all of the staff from the Superintendent on down.

VIII. PRIVATE CONTRACT MAINTENANCE

BASPC was asked to analyze private contract maintenance as an alternative to the present operation of the Piedmont Park Department. It is our considered opinion that a private contract would result in a higher standard of maintenance at a lower cost. Other units of government which we contacted have been satisfied with this type of maintenance. However, all of them use it as a supplement to their regular program and not for an entire park system.

San Mateo County recently let a \$348,000 contract for maintenance of a substantial number of acres around public buildings and schools, and at a few small parks. The City of Berkeley contracts for maintenance of a number of their small isolated parcels. Some other cities that have contracted a part of their park maintenance work include Santa Rosa, San Jose and Sunnyvale.

Successful use of contract maintenance requires detailed specifications for bidding purposes and continuous inspection to insure contract compliance. One difficulty that often arises is a difference of opinion between the contractor and the inspector as to the standards called for in the specifications.

If the City of Piedmont elects to go into contract maintenance, certain practical and legal problems have to be considered. Although the Civil Service rules and the City Charter do not include legal prohibitions against a layoff of civil service workers, a wholesale layoff of Park workers looking toward contracting for the same kind of services would probably require complying with the "Meet and Confer" provisions

of the Myers-Miliias-Brown Act. If pursued beyond negotiation, such a layoff might result in a legal action against the City.

Conversion to contract work could be accomplished over a period of time as Park employees retire or leave City employment. Under this arrangement, separate units of the Park System could be converted to private contracts as the Park staff is reduced in size by attrition. The Piedmont Athletic Field and Crocker Park would be the logical units to be given first consideration. Median strips, circles and other small decentralized areas could come next. Transfers of gardeners to vacancies in the Public Works Department might be used where acceptable to the worker involved. The phased approach to contract work would provide an opportunity for the City to evaluate the process before making a complete change.

An alternative to contract work as a means of raising maintenance standards would be a carefully planned program to upgrade the qualifications and work methods of the present staff, including a new approach to scheduling work and changes in supervisory practices. Elimination of some of the hindrances to efficient maintenance, along with improved work methods, could result in a lowering of costs by eliminating positions. This course of action could result in a work force reduction of two gardeners, if properly carried out.

A P P E N D I X

ANALYSIS OF PARK AREAS

The following is a detailed analysis of the park areas in the Piedmont Park System.

1. Upper Piedmont Park is the largest formal park area in the City. It has an area of approximately six acres and contains the major lawn areas of the park system. About four acres of the park are intensively developed with lawn, shrubs, ground covers, hedges, and other horticultural features.

The lawn areas suffer from a heavy infestation of broad leaf weeds that have choked out the grass and detract from its appearance. The St. Augustine grass plot next to the High School is healthy and obviously stands up well under heavy use. A careful spraying and fertilizing program is needed to remove the weeds. Some areas are so full of weeds that it may be difficult to restore the grass without replanting. All lawn areas except a narrow strip adjacent to Highland Avenue on the north side of the park are watered with hoses. The man-hours involved in this kind of irrigation increase maintenance costs. There is enough grass in the park to justify an automatic watering system.

Ground covers and shrubbery plantings overrun each other. There is need to prune and remove to give definition to each. Weed trees and weed shrubs should be removed selectively to improve appearance and allow for the proper development of the remaining plants. Paths need edging. Wood or concrete headers are needed to define edges and facilitate mowing and edging. Mowing would be easier if the edges of some lawn areas were realigned.

A few bare spots in the hedge along the parking lot should be replanted. Ivy growing into the parking area needs trimming. Ivy is also taking over the bench at Highland and Piedmont Court. The wood in the Arthur Merton Merrill Memorial bench should be replaced. The concrete walk downhill from the blue urn is in very bad shape and needs replacing. The tot lot surfacing needs renovation and the old equipment needs painting. Replacement and relocation of this facility would be desirable. The chain link fence should be repaired. It is temporarily patched with an old wooden table top. The ground cover in the area around the Piedmont Beautification Placque needs attention. What is left of the old wooden rails and posts that define the paths are unsightly and should be removed.

Park lighting is adequate in most of the park adjacent to Highland

Avenue but needs upgrading in areas along Guilford Road and Magnolia Avenue.

2. Lower Piedmont Park (9.25 acres) needs considerable work to bring it up to a level where it can be more easily maintained. The paths are in bad shape and need paving. There is considerable erosion of banks. Ivy is growing in some trees and elm shoots are in evidence at a number of locations. Broken branches from a large tree overhang the canyon behind the High School (have been there for two weeks).

A large skinned log serves as a hazardous bridge across the creek and invites children to use the unplanned steep path behind the High School (should be removed).

The Italian stone pines at the upper end near the barbecue area and tennis courts need drastic thinning. Other trees have dead branches and need attention. A number of trees need pruning.

The large log laying in the creek should be removed. The foot bridge near the end of the new service road needs planks replaced.

Litter cans that can't be dumped or removed by vandals should be placed along the central path at appropriate intervals.

At the lower end of the park near Wildwood Avenue a number of cotoneasters have been pruned in formal shapes with hedge shears. This is poor practice, particularly in the surrounding natural landscape. It is recommended that they be replaced with low growing natives (ceanothus and manzanita) when possible or severely back pruned to allow them to return to their natural shape.

The lower park area has great potential if properly developed as a natural canyon.

3. Dracena Park (7.8 acres) contains the corporation yard and nursery with an area of about 2.8 acres and another 5 acres of relatively undeveloped natural park. About one-third acre in the quarry is used for gardens, shrubs and special trees. Some specimen trees are planted around the pond.

What is left of the lawn area next to Artuna Avenue is in very poor condition. The landscaping is in poor condition. The shrubs, mostly cotoneaster, have been pruned with hedge shears rather than emphasizing their natural shapes. The playground equipment is located in an unsurfaced dirt area. Equipment is out of date and in poor condition. A complete renovation of lawn, landscaping and play area is needed. Some immediate impact could be made by removal of some shrubbery, enlarging and upgrading the lawn area with top dressing,

irrigation system also needs renovation.

The upper park is a natural undeveloped area with paths and limited picnic facilities. About one-third acre of sloping land adjacent to Dracena Avenue has some grass and pruned shrubs and trees. Most of the park is on steep slopes with a thick growth of trees. Trees should be thinned and dead branches removed. The heavy overgrown bushes that border the park should be thinned out to open up the area. In its present condition the park has very limited use.

The nursery portion of the park contains some propagated plants in cans and boxes, some trees that await planting and about 3,000 square feet of flower beds. Some Bonsai trees and plants are on display. The area is open to the public during the week but not on weekends. About two acres of land are devoted to the corporation yard, the old quarry lake and the sides of the quarry.

Lighting in Dracena Park is practically nonexistent. The installation of lighting should be incorporated in any planned improvement of the park.

4. Fairview Avenue Median (.67 acre) is a wide medium to steep slope about 700 feet long. It is planted with an overabundance of shrubs and large pine, cedar, poplar, oak and eucalyptus trees. It is overgrown and in need of re-landscaping. Most of the shrubbery should be eliminated and replaced with ground covers. A manual turn-on sprinkler system is recommended to reduce maintenance.
5. Grand Avenue Median (.70 acre) is a 1200 foot median narrower but similar to Fairview Avenue. It could be improved by removal of weed trees and selective removal of a number of shrubs to give a landscape look. Pre-emergence weed control should be followed in the fall to ease the maintenance load. Less shrubs will reduce man-hours for pruning. A manual turn-on valve irrigation system is recommended.
6. San Carlos Median (.45 acre) is a steeply sloped strip about 875 feet in length. It has some trees and dense shrubbery. Existing shrubs are sheared back rather than being pruned to natural shapes. Maintenance can be reduced by replanting with low growing and prostrate shrubs and ground covers. Watering is by hose. A new system with manual turn-on valve is recommended.
7. Linda Park (1.27 acres) is a 760 foot long slope with upper planting of trees and shrubs and a lower planting of ivy. Weeding is a big problem so the entire slope should be on a schedule for pre-emergence weed control in the fall. Some contact weed spraying is indicated now. The ivy needs extensive replanting which should be scheduled for fall. The slope requires regular watering and ferti-

lizing to encourage growth of the existing ivy.

8. Wildwood and Warfield (.09 acre) is a steep bank covered with shrubbery. It is an extremely difficult site to maintain in its present condition. Ivy or iceplant might succeed if low application rate sprinkler system were provided.
9. Nova Circle (.10 acre) is a well maintained, recently planted traffic island. A few patches of Bermuda grass should be eliminated by hand digging or with Dalapon. Some oxalis is present and should be removed by hand digging. A pre-emergence application is needed to prevent weed germination along with fertilizer to encourage quick growth.
10. Weldwood Triangle (.21 acre) is a grove of redwoods and fir with a mixture of shrubs. Maintenance can be reduced by removing cotoneasters, pyracanthas and other shrubs that need frequent pruning. Replace with low shrubs (junipers, manzanitas, coprosma kirkii). Area is clean and well maintained. A manual turn-on sprinkler system will reduce maintenance.
11. Oakmont Traffic Island (.03 acre) with few large trees and some shrubs is well maintained.
12. Hall Fenway (.26 acre) is nicely landscaped and well maintained. A manual valve turn-on system would facilitate maintenance. Lighting is adequate.
13. Sheridan Avenue Park (.48 acre) is a well maintained 500-foot strip park with lawn and shrubs - no suggestions except control of some weeds in lawn.
14. Crocker Park (.99 acre) is a new well designed park still under a maintenance contract. Lighting in Crocker Park is very adequate. It presents an attractive setting at night. No suggestions.
15. Scenic Circle is a small traffic island with one large Deodar and a planting of shrubs - in good condition, no suggestions.
16. Bellevue and Mountain is a small traffic island with Sequoia gigantea and low shrub planting - in good condition, no suggestions.
17. Sheridan Circle is a small traffic island with tree and hypericum ground cover. In good condition with exception of dead wood in tree that should be removed. Has manual sprinkler system.
18. Caperton Corner (.16 acre) is a small landscaped area at gore of Caperton and Sheridan. Plant material consists of lawn, trees,

day lilies, agapanthus, etc. Nicely maintained. Lawn should have header boards installed to improve appearance and facilitate edging.

19. Highland and Sheridan (.03 acre) is a traffic island, graded with sprinkler system installed, not planted.
20. City Hall (.03 acre) - Well maintained flower boxes.
21. Veterans Hall (.20 acre) - Most of the area is well maintained. Some shrubs have been trimmed back with shears - need natural pruning. There are some bare spots that need replanting and an infestation of nut sedge and other weeds across from the park needs treatment.

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